

wood pulp fibers, and microfiber microwebs contained or dispersed among the carrier fibers. When the carrier fibers are melt blown microfibers, the nonwoven web may also contain staple fibers. These nonwoven webs of carrier fibers and microfiber webs are useful for example, as sorbent material, filtration devices, and as thermal insulation. When the web is to be used as a liquid sorbent material, the microwebs can further comprise sorbent particulate material.

Applicants do not assert that Insley fails to teach cellulose fibers; however, Insley '948 fails to teach a step of "binding the superabsorbent particles to the binder containing cellulose fiber." As discussed in the submission with the RCE at page 5, Insley '948 describes binding absorbent particles to melt blown microfiber microwebs, but not to cellulose fibers.

The passage cited by the Examiner clearly discloses cellulose fibers, but it does not disclose the step of binding particles to a binder containing cellulose fiber. The cellulose fibers identified at column 3, lines 45-50, in the '948 patent are not described in the '948 patent as being treated with a binder material or as being used to bind particles.

Column 3, lines 45-50, teach that cellulose fibers, such as wood pulp fibers, can be used to form a nonwoven web that comprises the cellulose fibers as carrier fibers. In addition, the nonwoven web includes melt blown microfiber microwebs. Insley '948 teaches that particles can be bound to these melt blown microfiber microwebs. Insley does not teach that the particles are bound to cellulose fibers. Applicants have carefully reviewed the '948 patent and have not been able to identify any disclosure of particles being bound to cellulose fibers, let alone cellulose fibers treated with a binder. If the Examiner maintains this rejection, he is asked to specifically point out those passages of the '948 patent which teach or suggest the binding of particles to binder treated cellulose fibers. In the absence of such teaching, the subject matter recited in independent Claim 55 is novel and nonobvious over Insley '948.

In view of the dependence of Claims 56-77 from independent Claim 55, the arguments set forth above as to why the subject matter of Claim 55 is novel and nonobvious over Insley '948 are equally applicable to Claims 56-77.

Claims 55-77 are also rejected as being anticipated by or obvious over the Insley '178 patent. Applicants are surprised that this rejection has been repeated since it was previously

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overcome by the arguments set forth in the amendment mailed August 17, 2001, in response to the May 21, 2001, Examiner's Action. Applicants direct the Examiner's attention to pages 3 and 4 of the amendment mailed August 17, 2001. Applicants assert that the subject matter of pending Claims 55-77 is novel and nonobvious over Insley '178 for the reasons given in the August 17, 2001, amendment.

Kellenberger is cited as anticipating or rendering obvious the subject matter of Claims 55-77. Applicants respectfully disagree for the following reasons.

As discussed above, independent Claim 55 recites the step of "providing a binder containing cellulose fiber" and "combining superabsorbent particles...with the binder containing cellulose fiber." Kellenberger '335 does not disclose or suggest the step of providing binder containing cellulose fiber or of binding superabsorbent particles to such binder containing cellulose fiber. Applicants have carefully reviewed the cited columns 4-12 of Kellenberger '335 and have been unable to locate any teaching or suggestion of the above steps. In fact, applicants have not been able to locate even any disclosure or suggestion in the Kellenberger reference of applying a binder to cellulose fiber. If the Examiner continues to maintain this rejection, he is respectfully requested to identify those specific passages of Kellenberger '335 that teach or suggest the steps noted above.

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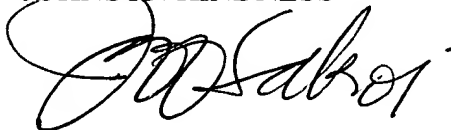
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For the foregoing reasons, applicants respectfully request withdrawal of the outstanding rejections of Claims 55-74 over Insley '948, Insley '178, and Kellenberger '335. If the Examiner has any questions regarding the above, he is invited to call applicants' attorney at the number listed below.

Respectfully submitted,

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I hereby certify that this correspondence is being deposited with the U.S. Postal Service in a sealed envelope as first class mail with postage thereon fully prepaid and addressed to the Commissioner for Patents, P.O. Box 2327, Arlington, VA 22202, on the below date.

Date: July 9, 2002

JMS:ejh

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